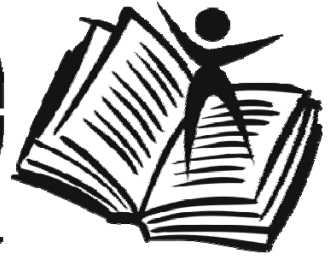


Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



October 2011 Mark 1 – 8 Reading & Discussion Guide

October Dates to Note:

MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO Mark 1 – 8:

- Mpls:** Monday, October 3, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Monday, October 6, at 7:00 p.m., Room 310, CFL Building

BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Read chapters 1 – 8 of the Gospel of Mark.

- a. We suggest you read through “Mark 1 – 8: Theme and Purpose” on page 4 and “Who or What Is . . . ?” on page 5 before you begin your reading of Mark 1 – 8.
- b. Use the “To Guide Your Reading” section on pages 6 - 8 to help you think through what you have read, paying particular attention to the questions in boldface.
- c. If you want to know more about the historical context, the theological themes, and the background to Mark, we highly recommend Luther Seminary's excellent site, www.enterthebible.org.

2. If possible, attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction to Mark 1 – 8.

3. Read and recite this month's memory verse often! It is:

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark: 1: 11

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a “message” just for you!

AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Welcome

Welcome to the October meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

Opening Prayer

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer or pray the following together:

Dear Lord,

*Thank you for this time together. As we explore your Word, lead us to understanding, but most of all help us to know you better. Bring the Holy Spirit among us to draw us closer to you so that we may love and serve you better. In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen.*

This Month’s Memory Verse

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

***And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;
with you I am well pleased.” -- Mark: 1: 11***

Getting Under Way

Take time for each person to share thoughts on one of the following:

- Share something about the season of autumn that reminds you of God’s power, blessings, or grace.
- What does it mean in your life to “bear good fruit”?

Setting the Scene

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor’s introduction to Mark 1 – 8 to share what they learned.

Discuss Together

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 – 8. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that particularly struck members of your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

Closing Remarks and Prayer

FOR NEXT MONTH

Our next meeting will be in November:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

November's Reading Assignment: Mark 9 – 16

November's Memory Verse:

*"Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will not pass away."* – Mark 13: 31

Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:

- Mpls:** Monday, November 7, at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** No overview at West due to New Member Dinner.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gather prayer concerns from the group. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for this time together, for the sharing of ideas and insights, and the fellowship of community. Thank you for what we have learned and for questions we still have. Use both to bring us closer to you and to grow deeper in our faith. Thank you, too, for the many gifts present in this room, including the gifts of fellowship and sharing. Be with each of us as we go our separate ways. Keep us safe within your love and strong for all that may confront us. With gratitude for the gracious and saving gift of Christ, Amen.

FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Ponder

We do not expect infants to grasp nuclear physics or six-year-olds to support themselves and live on their own. Rather, we try to match our expectations to the child's readiness physically, mentally, and emotionally. Many say that in a similar way, we grow into our faith, with God allowing lessons and insight when we are ready or mature enough to handle it. What do you think?

Mark 1 – 8: Theme & Purpose

There are four Gospels in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each one emphasizes a somewhat different aspect of Jesus' life, ministry, and message. More than Jesus' teachings, Mark emphasizes what Jesus did, most importantly his dying for our salvation. By paying close attention to Jesus' works, Mark provides a vivid portrait of Jesus' purpose and power.

“The Gospel [of Mark’s] purpose,” says New Testament scholar Paul S. Berge, *“is to bring readers from the beginning of Jesus’ story to the cross, where the true vision of Jesus’ messiahship is revealed.”* (www.enterthebible.org)

The shortest and earliest of the gospels, Mark was written after Christ's death, probably shortly before or after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. By then, the earliest generation of Christians would have died, leaving a vacuum of first-hand oral accounts. Understandably, this created some urgency to have a written account of Jesus' life, teachings, deeds, death, and resurrection.

It is widely assumed that the gospel writer known as Mark was an associate of Peter's who wrote what he heard Peter teach. This also may have been John Mark who for a time traveled with Paul and Barnabas. Often, the writer translates or explains Jewish words and customs (Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:2-4, 11, 34; 12:18; 14:36; 15:6, 16, 22, 34, 42), a clue that he was writing to Gentiles as well as Jews.

In particular, he may have been writing to comfort the persecuted Christian community in Rome. Another audience may have been Palestinian Jews living through the turbulent revolt against the occupying Romans (66-73 AD). Mark reminds his readers and us, that Jesus, who himself endured undeserved suffering on our behalf, was victorious in the end, just as those who believe in Jesus will be victorious. (See 4:16-17; 8:34-38; 9:42-48; 10:17-31, 38-39; and 13:9-13.)

Mark's image of Jesus the suffering servant is deftly woven into the larger image of Jesus as King. As the Son of God, Jesus establishes God's kingdom here on earth. He is the long-expected Messiah. Unlike the warrior king many expected however, Jesus' ultimate victory and kingship comes by way of the cross.

Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus encounters demons who recognize him for who he truly is and the power he commands. This is significant, because it points to the cosmic battle Jesus is fighting against Satan—a battle in which he consistently triumphs.

At one point in Mark (8:21), Jesus asks the disciples, “Do you not yet understand?” Quite often, the disciples fail to grasp that behind Jesus' teaching, healings, casting out of demons, and miracles is a larger purpose: to establish in peoples' minds and hearts the power, reign, and rule of God.

The disciples have problems, too, when Jesus tries to tell them about his coming trials, death, and resurrection (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-40). And, the disciples fail Jesus. They fall asleep after he asks them to keep watch as he prays about his upcoming suffering (13:33, 35, 37; 14:37, 40-41). Judas betrays Jesus; Peter denies him. The disciples Jesus chose are far from perfect, and yet Jesus entrusts them—as he does us—with the spread of the gospel, in spite of any imperfection!

In art, Mark the evangelist often is symbolized by a winged lion (“king of the beasts”). Next time you are in the sanctuary of our Minneapolis Campus, look at the main altar window. To the left of the central panel are two narrower panels, one atop the other. The bottom panel is Saint Mark, pictured with a winged lion in the top left corner.

Who or What Is . . . ?

Beelzebub. A heathen god considered by Jews to be the ultimate evil spirit.

Galilee. This beautiful area of the Middle East is in Northern Palestine, and is where Jesus spent his growing up years and most of his ministry. Less than 40 miles long and 30 miles wide, the high mountains and rugged terrain of the north contrast sharply with the softer, rolling hills of the south more suitable to agriculture. During Jesus' time, Galilee was a crossroads for commerce, with new cities being built and old ones growing. While this created good markets for the agriculture and fishing industries, the reality of very high Roman taxes kept wealth at bay for most citizens.

Messiah. When Jesus asks his disciples about his identity, Peter confesses, "You are the Messiah" (8:29). This title is not heard again until close to the end of the gospel—and Jesus' life here on earth—when the high priest asks him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" (14:61). From beginning to end, Mark's gospel lets the reader know the answer: Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one of God, the fulfillment of Jewish messianic expectation.

Messianic Secret. While Mark reveals Jesus as Messiah to the reader, Jesus more than once silences those who would declare his true identity (1:21-27, 34, 43-44; 3:11-12; 5:42-43; 7:36; 8:27-30; 9:9, 30). This desire to keep his full identity quiet is sometimes called the "Messianic Secret." This may have been a matter of Jesus knowing and keeping to God's "divine timing"—when and how God planned to fully reveal Jesus' true identity and purpose.

Synagogue. Jewish "congregations" that met for the reading of scripture, prayer, and instruction in the Law of Moses. Some also were used as courts and/or schools.

Tearing apart of the heavens and temple curtain. Twice in Mark, the verb for "tearing apart" is used. The first is at Jesus' baptism (1:10-11), when the Spirit comes as a dove and God's voice is heard announcing, "You are my Son, the Beloved." The second is at the crucifixion (15:37-39), when the curtain that separated the innermost part of the Temple is torn away, allowing all to enter. These two events form a beginning and ending framework for the Gospel. God is not hidden in heaven or in the innermost chambers of the temple, but is living and present with us in and through Jesus who gives his life for all on the cross.

Twelve Disciples. A disciple is someone who accepts, follows, and shares the teachings of another. We practice Christian discipleship when our words and actions bear witness to Jesus. In Mark 3:13-19, Jesus appoints twelve disciples. Similar lists in Matthew 10:2-4 and Luke 6:13-16 differ slightly. This is only because some of the disciples went by more than one name. The twelve are: Peter (also called Simon [Matthew 10:2-4]); James the son of Zebedee; John the brother of James; Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew (also referred to as Matthew the tax collector); Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus (also called Judas the son of James [Luke 6:16]); Simon the Cananaean (also known as Simon the Zealot); Judas Iscariot (replaced by Mattias after Judas' death [Acts 1:21-26]).

The Unforgiveable Sin. In Mark 3:28-29, Matthew 12:31-32, and Luke 12:10 Jesus says that anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. What Jesus is talking about here is the complete turning away from and rejecting God, and thus God's forgiveness.

Information on this and the preceding page is drawn in part from Luther Seminary's www.entertheBible.org, and is used with permission.

To Guide Your Reading

Use the following divisions and questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection.

Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest you consider at your small group meeting.

Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest and concern to the group. Let the Spirit lead!

NOTE: As you read Mark, **consider underlining** or otherwise noting various **names or synonyms used for Jesus**, such as *Son of God*, *Son of Man*, or *Christ*. **Look, too, for words describing what Jesus does**, such as *heal*, *teaching*, *sign*, and so forth. This will help you grasp the extent to which Mark's focus is on Jesus' deeds more than his teachings. Also watch for words and phrases such as *immediately*, *as soon as*, *quickly*, *without delay*. Paying attention to how often they appear gives you a sense of the urgency the writer is trying to convey.

WEEK 1 – MARK 1:1 – 3:19

Mark 1:1 – 1:13 Jesus' Preparation and Beginning Ministry

1. In the Isaiah quote in verse 2, who does the "I" refer to? Who is "my messenger"? For whom is this messenger preparing the way?
2. If baptism was about cleansing from sin and Jesus was sinless, why do you think Jesus had to be baptized?
3. **After telling the story of Jesus' baptism, Mark says that the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan for forty days. What do you think God's purpose was for this?**

Mark 1:14 – 3:19 Jesus' Early Ministry in Galilee

1. Read 1:23-25. Who is speaking in verse 24? What happens to the speaker? As you continue reading Mark, pay attention to Jesus' encounters with demons/evil spirits and what happens when they occur.

Mark 1:14 – 3:19 questions continue on next page.

2. **Read 2:1-12. According to Jesus, what was the paralyzed man's greatest need? When people you know are in times of great distress, do you more naturally pray for their spiritual or physical needs? Why do you think that is your first instinct? Why are both important?**
3. In Mark 2:18 – 28, why does Jesus say he and his disciples are not fasting? What do you think Jesus means in saying that he is "lord even of the Sabbath"?
4. In 3:7-8, where is Jesus teaching? Who has come to hear him? Why had they come? After reading the "rest of the story" in verses 9-12, what things strike you?

WEEK 2 – MARK 3:20 – 6:56

Mark 3:20 – 6:56 Jesus' Continuing Ministry in Galilee

1. In 3:20-21, why does Jesus' family come to get him? In verse 22, what do the scribes accuse Jesus of? What do you understand Jesus to be saying in verses 23-27?
2. In 3:35, who does Jesus say are his mothers and brothers? How does this help you understand what is meant when we talk about welcoming someone into God's family?
3. **Which of the parables in 4:1-34 is your favorite? Why? Which parable do you find most confusing or unsettling? Why?**
4. Choose one of the stories of Jesus' healings and miracles from these 4:35 – 6:56. Read it very slowly, stopping to think about the details in each sentence. Imagine being there, perhaps even being the one healed or closely involved in the miracle (for example, a disciple on the stormy sea or one of the hungry multitudes who were fed). What do you notice that you had not thought about before? Why new insights or questions do you have?

WEEK 3 – MARK 7:1 – 8:38 and Summary

Mark 7:1 – 8:38

1. **Read 7:1-23. In 7:2, what Jewish law are the disciples breaking? In 7:14-23, what argument does Jesus make for why such laws are not of primary importance? What might it be saying to us today about our own lives and discipleship?**
2. What question does Jesus ask the disciples in 8:27-30? What answers do they give? What was the right answer? Why do you think Jesus instructs them to not tell anyone?
3. In 8:31, what does Jesus begin to teach the disciples? Now read 8:32-38. What statements from Jesus or the disciples do you find striking? Confusing? Enlightening?

In summary

1. Mark 3:13-19 gives us the complete list of those Jesus chose as disciples. What did Jesus appoint these men to do (verse 14)? What is your impression of the disciples? What do you most admire about them? What surprises you? How do these imperfect men help you feel more able to engage in discipleship yourself?
2. **In what ways do you see Jesus' kingship emerging in these chapters?**
3. In Mark 8:31-33, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection. Why do you think Peter reacts the way he does? Why do you think Jesus' response to Peter's reaction is so harsh? (Note: The word for *Satan* also means "tempter.")
4. Together with your group, recall the various names or synonyms Mark uses for Jesus in these chapters. Next, make a list of words you found describing what Jesus does in these chapters. If you were going to paint a picture of Jesus, how might you fit what these words tell you into your image? (Have fun with this; it is not a test of artistic ability! ☺)